

Compiling a Wisconsin Legislative History
By Mary Jones - Milwaukee Satellite Librarian

Research history for Wisconsin Statutes has never been easy, but has just become more accessible due to online sources.

It is now possible to do legislative histories on WESTLAW at WI-LH, which has documents related to laws passed by the state legislature including bill histories and analyses, Assembly and Senate journals and memoranda, and governor's messages from the 94th Legislature (1999-2000) through the 2005 session of the 97th Legislature (2005-2006). The WI-LEGIS-OLD database includes documents from the 1988 portion of the 1987-1988 biennial session through the 2003-2004 session. When searching the WI-LH database, use a citation or field search to view a document with a known citation. Use ci("act 12" & 1995) for 1995 Wisc. Legis. Serv. Act 12 (1995 A.B. 21). Use ci("s.b. 40" & 1995) for 1995 Senate Bill No. 40.

It is always possible that a legislative history for the statute you are interested in may have already been done and published in a law review article. You will most often find them in the *Wisconsin Lawyer*. All of the Wisconsin law reviews can be found on WESTLAW (database identifier WI-JLR) or LEXIS (database identifier WILRV).

An article in the May 2006 *Wisconsin Lawyer* (available at www.wisbar.org), "Looking for Information on Wisconsin Legislation," by Carol J. Schmitt, talks about major changes to the Wisconsin Legislature web site (www.legis.state.wi.us) and introduces researchers to additional sites: the Wisconsin Legislative Drafting Records database created by the U.W. Law Library (libcd.law.wisc.edu:81/~draftingrecords/), the Legislative Reference Bureau web site (www.legis.state.wi.us/lrb/index.htm), and the Legislative Fiscal Bureau web site (www.legis.state.wi.us/lfb/index.html).

In addition to the web sites listed in Schmitt's article, the Wisconsin Legislative Council web site (www.legis.state.wi.us/lc/2_Publications/Publications.htm), provides reports on recent legislation. The major problem with all of these web sites is that they usually do not cover legislative actions prior to 2000. Therefore, it is necessary to check each site for specific coverage.

If you need assistance with a legislative history for an older Wisconsin Statute (prior to 1988), please call the Milwaukee library. We will need the Wisconsin Act number, year of passage, and a section number if applicable, to retrieve bill drafting records. These records, dating back to 1865, are available on microfiche from the Marquette Law Library. The library staff can borrow the fiche on interlibrary loan, and make the records accessible on our microfiche reader/printer.

If you need help with a legislative history and/or prior pages from the Wisconsin Administrative Code, we have the Wisconsin Administrative Record and all prior changes for the past twenty five years (dating from 3-81) in the court library. If what you need is not available, we can also obtain older pages from the Marquette Law Library or from the Revisor of the Statutes in Madison – an excellent source for information on the Administrative Code.